

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE MARY ROSE OAKAR
BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES
COMMITTEE ON THE POST OFFICE AND CIVIL SERVICE

APRIL 24, 1985

MR. CHAIRMAN, IT IS A PLEASURE TO APPEAR THIS MORNING BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES TO LEND MY SUPPORT TO H.R. 1534. THIS BILL WOULD MAKE PERMANENT THE TEMPORARY AUTHORITY TO ALLOW FEDERAL EMPLOYEES TO WORK ON A FLEXIBLE OR COMPRESSED WORK SCHEDULE, BETTER KNOWN AS THE ALTERNATIVE WORK SCHEDULES PROGRAM.

I WANT TO COMMEND THE CHAIRMAN FOR CALLING THESE HEARINGS AND MOVING SO EXPEDITIOUSLY ON THE LEGISLATION, WHICH I AM VERY PROUD TO CO-SPONSOR.

AS YOU KNOW, IN 1982, CONGRESS AUTHORIZED THE ALTERNATIVE WORK SCHEDULES PROGRAM FOR A SECOND, THREE-YEAR EXPERIMENT. THE EXPERIMENT WILL EXPIRE IN THREE MONTHS -- JULY 23 -- UNLESS WE ACT SWIFTLY TO MAKE THIS SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM PERMANENT.

STUDIES OF THE SIX-YEAR PROGRAM HAVE SHOWN THAT THE ADVANTAGES OF THE ALTERNATIVE WORK SCHEDULES (AWS) PROGRAM FAR OUTWEIGH ANY ALLEGED DISADVANTAGES. FOR EXAMPLE, IN A SURVEY CONDUCTED BY THE GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE (GAO) OF 11 AGENCIES, THE PERCEPTIONS OF THE AWS PROGRAM, WITH ONE EXCEPTION, WERE GENERALLY POSITIVE AND THE OFFICIALS WHO WERE QUESTIONED FAVORED CONTINUATION OF THE PROGRAM.

MOST OF THE AGENCY OFFICIALS CITED IMPROVED EMPLOYEE MORALE AND PRODUCTIVITY, AND DECREASES IN OVERTIME, TARDINESS AND SHORT-TERM LEAVE USAGE. IN GENERAL, GREATER EFFICIENCY OF OPERATIONS

WAS REALIZED IN THOSE AGENCIES PARTICIPATING IN THE PROGRAM. ADDITIONALLY, A MAJORITY OF THE AGENCIES SURVEYED FELT THAT THE AWS PROGRAM HAS ENHANCED THEIR ABILITY TO SERVE THE PUBLIC. THEY SPECIFICALLY CITED SUCH ADVANTAGES AS EXTENDED OFFICE HOURS, BETTER TELEPHONE COVERAGE, AND GREATER FLEXIBILITY TO SCHEDULE APPOINTMENTS WITH MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC.

THE AWS PROGRAM HAS NOT ONLY IMPROVED THE GOVERNMENT'S ABILITY TO SERVE THE PUBLIC, BUT HAS ALSO HAD POSITIVE EFFECTS ON GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES. THE FLEXTIME AND COMPRESSED SCHEDULES HAVE PERMITTED EMPLOYEES TO ADJUST THEIR SCHEDULES TO MEET INDIVIDUAL NEEDS WITHOUT INTRUDING UPON VALUABLE OFFICE TIME.

IN PARTICULAR, PARENTS HAVE BENEFITED FROM THE AWS PROGRAM. BOTH WOMEN AND MEN, WHO HAVE EITHER SOLE OR JOINT RESPONSIBILITY FOR CHILD-CARE ARRANGEMENTS, CITED GREATER LEEWAY IN ARRANGING THEIR HOME LIVES AND PERSONAL SCHEDULES AS AN ASSET TO IMPROVED JOB PERFORMANCE. THE COMPRESSED SCHEDULES ALLOWED EMPLOYEES TO CONDUCT NECESSARY FAMILY ACTIVITIES WHILE STILL DEVOTING THE SAME NUMBER OF HOURS PER WEEK TO THEIR JOBS. SUCH FLEXIBLE SCHEDULES MAKE IT EASIER FOR WORKING PARENTS TO ENTER AND STAY IN THE WORKFORCE, AND AID IN THE RECRUITMENT OF PART-TIME AND HANDICAPPED INDIVIDUALS.

GENERALLY, ALL AGENCY OFFICIALS SURVEYED BELIEVE EMPLOYEE MORALE HAS GREATLY IMPROVED. EMPLOYEES HAVE MORE POSITIVE ATTITUDES, ARE MORE SATISFIED WITH THEIR JOBS, AND ARE ABLE TO DEVOTE MORE TIME TO FAMILY AND PERSONAL INTERESTS -- ALL WITHOUT TAKING TIME AWAY FROM THEIR OFFICE DUTIES.

LASTLY, A SURVEY OF FEDERAL EMPLOYEES' ATTITUDES REVEALED

THAT, OF THE APPROXIMATELY 80% WHO RESPONDED, 92% SUPPORT CONTINUATION OF THE AWS PROGRAM. IN ADDITION, APPROXIMATELY 79% OF THE RESPONDENTS BELIEVE THE PROGRAM HAS HAD A HIGHLY FAVORABLE EFFECT ON THEIR MORALE.

ALTHOUGH SYSTEMATIC REVIEWS OF THE AWS PROGRAM IN EACH AGENCY ARE NOT YET COMPLETE, THE DATA AND OPINIONS EXPRESSED OVERWHELMINGLY SPEAK FOR CONTINUATION OF THE AWS PROGRAM. IT IS APPARENT FROM THE VERY FAVORABLE COMMENTS AND FINDINGS, THAT THE AWS PROGRAM IS WORKING AS INTENDED AND SHOULD BECOME A PERMANENT PART OF THE FEDERAL PERSONNEL PROGRAM.

THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT, AS AN EMPLOYER, MUST RECOGNIZE THE CHANGING NATURE OF AMERICAN LIFE AND THE NECESSITY OF BALANCING WORK AND PERSONAL LIVES SO BOTH CAN THRIVE. OUR WORKFORCE HAS DRAMITICALLY CHANGED OVER THE PAST DECADE, AS HAS THE LIFE-STYLE OF THE AMERICAN WORKER. IT IS IMPORTANT THAT GOVERNMENTAL INSTITUTIONS AND EMPLOYERS REFLECT THIS CHANGE IN WORKING PRACTICES TO MAINTAIN AN EXPERIENCED AND PRODUCTIVE WORKFORCE.

I FIRMLY BELIEVE THAT THE AWS PROGRAM SHOULD BE PERMANENTLY REAUTHORIZED AND COMMEND THE CHAIRMAN FOR HIS LEADERSHIP ON THIS MATTER.